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ABSTRACT

The implications of career education are considered for handicapped persons. It is explained that career education consists of all experiences for learning about work; and basic definitions are given for "work", "career", "vocation", "occupation", "leisure" and "education". Work as a basic human need and human right is discussed; and economic, sociological and psychological reasons for working are explored. Statistical predictions concerning underemployment and unemployment of handicapped high school graduates during the next four years are cited in order to emphasize the necessity of making career education opportunities available. Stressed as particularly relevant for the handicapped are basic career education principles such as the right to choose from among a wide range of personally meaningful work possibilities and emphasis upon accomplishment and discovery of an individual's talents rather than his limitations. (LH)

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CAREER EDUCATION AND THE HANDICAPPED PERSON

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Introduction

Career Education represents a response to a call for educational reform. This call has arisen from a variety of sources, each of which has voiced dissatisfaction with American education as it currently exists. Such sources include students, parents, the business-labor-industry-professional community, and the general public. Special segments of the population, including the economically disadvantaged, minorities, the handicapped, and gifted persons have also expressed deep dissatisfaction with both the appropriateness and the adequacy of educational opportunities that are made available to them. While their specific concerns vary, all seem to agree that American education is in need of major reform at all levels. Career Education is properly viewed as one of several possible responses that could be given to this call.

Career Education seeks to respond to this call for change through making education as preparation for work both a prominent and a permanent goal of our entire educational system. To accomplish this goal, career education seeks first to unite all segments of the formal educational system in this common effort. To this, we seek to add the collaborative efforts of both the business-labor-industry-professional community and the home and family structure in ways that enhance attainment of this goal for all persons through a broad range of community services and activities.

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From the beginning, career education advocates have proclaimed that they seek to serve all persons of all ages in all kinds of educational settings. In practice, we have seen career education programs primarily limited to elementary and secondary school youth enrolled in regular public school programs. This situation cannot continue if the promises of career education are to be attained. In this article, the problem will be illustrated through considering implications of career education for handicapped persons.

Basic Definitions Essential for Understanding Career Education

Six basic words must be redefined in order to understand the concept of career education itself. These six words are: (1) "work"; (2) "career"; (3) "vocation"; (4) "occupation"; (5) "leisure"; and (6) "education".

"Work" is conscious effort aimed at producing benefits for oneself and/or for oneself and others. As such, it is unimportant whether such effort is paid or unpaid in nature. What is important is that it represent the basic need of all human beings to achieve - to accomplish - to do something productive that allows the individual to discover both who he/she is and why he/she is. With this definition, work is properly viewed as a human right - not as a societal obligation.

"Career" is the totality of work one does in his or her lifetime. Thus, any person can have only one career. That career typically begins prior to entering formal schooling and continues well into the retirement years.

"Vocation" is one's primary work role at any given point in time. Vocations include paid employment, but they also extend to unpaid work roles. For example, we can speak of the "vocation" of the student, the full-time

volunteer worker, or the full-time homemaker just as easily as we can speak about the "vocation" of the plumber, the physician, or the engineer.

"Occupation" is one's primary work role in the world of paid employment. Economic returns are always considered among the work values of persons engaged in occupations although these might not be considered at all by persons in certain vocations. The occupations of many persons will be synonomous with their vocations. One can never have an occupation without having a vocation although, of course, one can have a "vocation" without being engaged in an "occupation".

"Leisure" consists of activities, other than sleeping, in which one engages when not performing in his or her vocation. Thus, "leisure" holds possibilities for both "work" and for "play".

"Education" consists of all those activities and experiences through which one learns. As such, it is obviously a lifelong process and considerably broader in meaning than the term "schooling".

All that follows is based on an assumption that these six basic words are understood and their meanings agreed upon. Those who disagree with one or more of these definitions will necessarily find themselves disagreeing with much of the remainder of this presentation.

With the way in which these six terms are defined, "career education's" definition, in a generic sense, becomes simple and straightforward. Career Education consists of all those activities and experiences through which one learns about work. As such, it makes no restrictions in meaning whether one speaks about work of the homemaker, the musician, the lawyer, or the bricklayer. Some work will require advanced college degrees while other

work may include no formal schooling of any kind. Some work will be in the form of primary work roles, paid or unpaid, while other work will be carried out as part of one's leisure time. To the extent that work is judged "successful", it does typically - and, in these times, increasingly - require some learned set of vocational skills.

Further Consideration of the Meaning of Work

The preceding definition of "career education" brings us back to further consideration of the meaning and implications of the four letter word "work". Work, as used here, is a concept available only to human beings in that it is restricted to conscious effort - to something that the individual thinks about and chooses to do. It is this quality of conscious choice that most clearly distinguishes the word "work" from the word "labor". That is, "labor", like "work", may very well result in production of benefits, but it does not carry with it the connotation of something that the individual consciously chooses to do. Instead, "labor" is more accurately regarded as forced, involuntary effort that lacks personal meaningfulness and significance for those who perform it.

Why do people work? Answers given tothis question can be grouped into three broad classifications of reasons - economic, sociological, and psychological. Work, in the world of paid employment, always includes economic reasons and, if maximally meaningfull to the individual, carries sociological and psychological reasons as well. Economic reasons, of course, center around the needs most of us have to accumulate income so that we can purchase goods, products, or services produced through the work of others. Sociological reasons center around recognition that one's work

contributes to the goals of our society in a positive way - that what one does has benefit for one's fellow human beings. Psychological reasons center around personal recognition of one's accomplishments - around the feeling of being someone through being able to say that one has accomplished something.

While most persons experience economic reasons for working and many, although not all, can readily observe the sociological significance of the work that they do, the single reason for working that can be said to apply to all persons is that which centers around the psychological dimension. Former President Lyndon Johnson perhaps expressed this need for work as clearly as anyone when, in a speech, he said

> "To hunger for use and to go unused is the greatest hunger of all."

He was, of course, referring to the human need of all human beings to feel that someone needs them for something - that it does matter to someone that they exist - that, because they are alive, the world is, in some way and to some degree, better off.

The concerns and scope of career education extend to all three of these basic reasons for working. It is this breadth of concern that enables career education to say that it is concerned with all persons of all ages in all settings from all levels of educational background. The basic premise of career education is that the need to work is a basic human need for all human beings. That is why we refer to work as a "human right" rather than as a "societal obligation".

Career Education and Handicapped Persons

In a recent paper, C. Samuel Barone, USOE Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, presented the following predictions regarding the approximately 2.5 million handicapped youth who will leave our school systems in the next four years:

525,000 - 21% - will be either fully employed or enrolled in college.

1,000,000 - 40% - will be underemployed and at the poverty level.

200,000 - 8% - will be in their home community and idle much of the time.

650,000 - 26% - will be unemployed and on welfare

75,000 - 3% - will be totally dependent and institutionalized.*

Predictions, such as these, raise very grave concerns for those dedicated to the career education movement. The prediction that one million of these handicapped youth will be underemployed is a very serious matter indeed. The concept of underemployment is one that pictures a person as possessing greater degrees of productive capability than the tasks he or she is asked to perform routinely require. Underemployment leads to boredom on the job and is seen by many as a major contributor to worker alienation in our society at the present time. To predict that this will be the fate of 2 our of every 5 handicapped youth leaving our school system in the next four years can only be regarded as a serious indictment of our educational system and of the larger society.

We have, for far too long, seemed to act as though a handicapped person should be both pleased with and grateful for any kind of work society provides. Unlike other persons, we seem to assume that, if a person is handicapped, boredom on a job is impossible. Worse, much of society has seemed to assume that, while most persons should seek work compatible

with their interests and aptitudes, such considerations are not necessary when seeking to find employment for handicapped persons. If any job in the world of paid employment can be found for the handicapped person, we seem far too often to be personally relieved and surprised when the handicapped person is anything less than effusively grateful.

Similarly, we seem to assume that those handicapped persons who are not employed in the world of paid employment are not and cannot be working. This is, in the philosophy of career education, both false and wrong. We know that, for example, the fact that a person is unemployed and on welfare certainly does not mean, for many such persons, that they do not work. There is a very great deal of work being carried out in many welfare homes, the results of which are readily apparent to any who visit in such homes. Yet, because persons on welfare are not engaged in the world of paid employment, society seems to assume that they are not working. Even more tragic, some seem to assume that people on welfare do not want to work. If the human need to work pictured here has any validity at all, it certainly applies to persons on welfare just as to all other persons.

The 200,000 youth who are predicted to be in their home community and idle much of the time can certainly not be written off as persons with no interest in working or no personal needs to work. Something should be provided for such persons, whether it be paid or unpaid work. The field of the handicapped has, for years, been promoting the concept of the sheltered workshop for those who are unable to compete effectively in the world of paid employment. The prime rationale for the sheltered workshop must surely lie in recognition of the human need for work that is being discussed here. If

this concept is valid for those in sheltered workshops, it is certainly also valid for those who are not.

Career education seeks to make work possible, meaningful, and satisfying for all individuals. To do so for handicapped persons demands, first of all, that we regard their right to choose from among the widest possible set of opportunities equally as important as for any other individual. We seem too often to be satisfied when we have found something that a handicapped person can do. We should be dissatisfied until and unless we have explored, to the fullest possible extent, the total array of work that might be possible for a given handicapped person. To stop prior to reaching this point is being less than fair to the handicapped person and to the larger society.

One further basic principle of the career education movement would seem to have some relevance for handicapped persons. This is the principle that holds that we should seek to emphasize the individual's successes, not his or her failures. In career education, a conscientious attempt is made to emphasize accomplishments - attainments - achievements - doing. This can best be carried out by refusing to emphasize failures and shortcomings. It would seem that this principle holds some positive potential for working with handicapped persons who, far too often, are made well aware of their limitations and, in the process, effectively limited in discovering their talents. We have, it would seem, been sometimes too much concerned about helping the handicapped realize and appreciate how much society is doing for them. In so doing, we run the risk of de-emphasizing, for many handicapped persons, how much each can do for himself or herself.

Concluding Remarks

Handicapped persons are as deserving of whatever benefits career education has to offer as are any other individuals. To date, not many career education programs have made the kinds of special efforts necessary in order to make career education a reality for handicapped persons. It is hoped that these remarks may stimulate both those in career education and those working in the field of the handicapped to work together in order to correct this lack of attention. The need to work is a human need of all human beings. Handicapped persons are human beings.

References

*Barone, C. Samuel - Paper presented to a Forum of National Organizations sponsored by the Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association, the National Rehabilitation Association, and the Presidents Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped. October 25, 1973.